

Time Running Out for Commuters
Failure to act could result in \$1,000 hike for commuters

Huntington, NY – On Monday, Rep. Steve Israel (D – Huntington) joined with members of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council at the LIRR train station in Huntington to call for urgent action to extend pre-tax commuter benefits before they expire on December 31, 2011. The commuter benefit is caught in the end of the year backlog in Congress along with the payroll tax cut and unemployment insurance.

"Commuters already endure delayed trains and long rides to work and now some in Congress are going to ask them to pay \$1,000 a year more for it. The pre-tax commuter benefit is critically important for middle class families on Long Island. Congress has stalled long enough, it's time to get the trains moving," said Rep. Israel.

"It's past time for Congress to not only extend the pre-tax commuter benefit but to make it permanent. Let's get back on track and help commuters commute to work," said Mark Epstein, Chairman of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council.

The pre-tax commuter benefit applies to bus and train riders as well as van poolers. It is currently set at up to \$230 per month and will drop by nearly half to \$125 a month on December 31. Employees opt-in to the program and determine their level of participation. The benefit is excluded from an employee's gross income and wages for payroll tax purposes, meaning if it expires, it will also increase the tax liability for employers, making it harder for them to hire new workers. In 2010, employers saved an estimated \$300 million by offering the transit benefit.

The LIRR carries an average 301,000 customers every weekday and is the busiest commuter railroad in North America.